

Poems 1930-1936

By the same author

BELLES-LETTRES

DREAMERS AND DOERS. A DISCUSSION

LEAVES OF LIFE. A DIARY

TYROLEAN SUMMER. TRAVEL-SKETCHES

HEBRIDEAN HOLIDAY. TRAVEL-SKETCHES

POETRY

THE OLD SHEPHERD

Poems 1930-1936

by

Owen Hamilton

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TO
JEAN AND MARGARET CAMERON
AND
VILHELM DE GEER

. . . im Kampfe verblutet des Dichters Brust!

H. C. ANDERSEN

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CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
FAIRY-TALE	13
*SUSSEX LARKS.	14
AUTUMN	15
THUNDER	16
*CAMEO	17
*SOMETHING?—	18
THE THREE FISHERMEN	19
*A SUSSEX FARMSTEAD	20
THE DRAGON-FLY	21
LODESTAR	22
SHEPHERD TO DOG	23
*THE VIOLET-WILLOW	24
NOCTURNE	25
DAHLIAS	26
REBIRTH	27
*THE WILY LARK	28
THE OWL	29
LUX EX TENEBRIS	30
INDIAN SUMMER	31
*ENGLISH DAWN	32
ECONOMY	33
THE RING-DOVE	34
*A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LAD	35
AUTUMN PLOUGHING-MATCH	36
THE THISTLE	37
ON HEARING A SERVICE BROADCAST	38

	<i>page</i>
FORGIVENESS	39
SYMPATHY	40
TO A——	41
*GROWTH	42
EASTER-DAY	43
*‘I HAD NOT MEANT TO SING’	44
*THE ICICLES	45
RUSTIC LOVE: DICK’S DREAM—MOLL’S FULFILMENT	46
VETERAN	48
THE TRAMP’S SONG	49
OLD BACHELOR’S SONG	50
*NATURE	52
*THE WHITE BLACKBIRD	53
*THE BOOM-CRANE	54
THE CHELTENHAM FLIER	55
WOMAN	56
LINES WRITTEN ON READING NIETZSCHE	57
TREES	58
SUMMER DAY-DREAM	59
FELLOWSHIP	60
PRIDE’S PRISON	61
EBB AND FLOW	62
THE YOUNG LABOURER	63
*OSCAR WILDE	64
*THE POPPY	65
*THE WIND	66
PAST PAGE	67
LIFE’S LANDMARKS	68

*COUNTERFEIT	69
INDIAN LOVE	70
WINTER SONG	71
THE IDEAL	72
QUESTION	73
THE RETURN OF THE EWES	74
TO A WILD ANEMONE	75
SANDHURST REVISITED	76
LIFE	78
*LIGHT	79
TCHAIKOWSKY THEME	80
ATHLETE IN ACTION	81
UIST-SHEPHERD'S SONG	82
SKETCH	83
*THE CLOUD	84
*BIRDS IN SPRING	85
DE PROFUNDIS	86
BLACKTHORN WINTER	87
FINALE	89
THE YOUNG NUN	90
PORTRAIT	91
SAD SONG	92
CITY SNOW-STORM	93
VOYAGE	94

* Reprinted from *The Old Shepherd*

FAIRY-TALE

Oh engine-driver! engine-driver! on the midnight mail:
To me you are a prince from some forgotten fairy-tale;
This engine an impatient Pegasus anxious for the sky;
These driving wheels his mighty wings on which to
upward fly.

Oh engine-driver! engine-driver! on the midnight mail:
No ship for the south seas more magically set sail
Than your great girded galleon, when it shall glide
Gently forth from its bemansion'd moorings. Let me, too,
ride

Upon the saddle of your snorting steed; for I am ill—
Ill with the complexities of life—and I am still
A child! Take me away! Can you not understand—
You, who ride nightly northwards into fairyland?

Euston

SUSSEX LARKS

Where do the larks sing
As on a Sussex down ?
It seems the distant sea,
The chalk cliffs and the town
Add to their ecstasy:

As if the gorse and thorn
And the low-lying hills,
River and rolling plain
Had taught them secret trills,
Stolen from sky and rain:

As if that shepherd lad
Up from the village there,
With sea-wind in his eyes
And happy, careless air
Had lent them melodies.

For such a surge of song
Cannot be all their own;
They must have borrowed part
Of their perfect tone
From Sussex soil and heart!

AUTUMN

Fall first autumn leaf
Without my grief!
For countless buds now
Burgeon each bough.

Fly away swallow!
I know that to-morrow,
Over the sea,
Fly others to me.

Oh butterfly die!
I shall not sigh.
The eggs thou hast laid
New butterflies made.

Thou flower fade!
Unafraid, unafraid!
Thy small unseen seeds
Are next year's weeds.

Cease all insect life
From song and strife!
Thy children that rest
Shall labour best.

Tyrol

THUNDER

This is the warning note that Zeus makes
After, with flash of wand, He parts the clouds
To loose the torrents from His aerial lakes
Upon the earth's parched lands and thirsting crowds

This is the mighty signal of His Love
That crowns the flashes as He smites the sky;
The rolling Voice that thunders from above:
"I am the Over All and thou the fly!"

This is the stern reminder to the wise—
To those who sit on throne or study-stool—
Who even score immortal symphonies—
That Zeus treats equally the wit or fool
And does not fail at times to strike him dead,
While rivers welter from His water-shed.

CAMEO

Two lovers left St. Martin's church,
Smiling and coy;
An organ in St. Martin's church
Rolled out its joy.

Below, the children fed the birds
In Trafalgar square,
And tranquilly above the birds
The sky spread there.

Dreaming over St. Martin's Place
A statue stood;
Symbol to all St. Martin's Place
Of fortitude.

A yellow poster opposite
Scandal exposed
And, by that poster opposite,
A drunkard dozed.

SOMETHING :—

There is something
I wish I could sing
About this April day:
Something sad yet gay,
Borne on the song of thrushes:
Something that rushes!
Something I heard
Long, long ago
From a blue-bird,
In a forgotten grotto
That the gods know.

THE THREE FISHERMEN

Three fishermen they were—
The sort one gets
Upon a British beach,
Roping their herring nets,
Spread out in rows to dry
Before summer sets.

One was a buccaneer,
Born out of time;
Another a Ruskin
With beard in his prime;
The third—a young Greek God:
He was sublime!

They spoke as they worked,
Direct as the sea;
Their statements were slow
But their minds free.
They all had the ocean's
Serenity.

Well-patched were their clothes
Yet clear every eye.
Each one possessed
What no gold can buy:
Secrets that sailors learn
From sea and sky!

A SUSSEX FARMSTEAD

The rafter'd house was worthy
Of its countrymen;
Being built about a central chimney
Of square and stocky stem,
Where many a denizen
Of Tudor times would come
To quaff and talk, just as to-day,
With all the kindliness a man could show,
My sturdy host quaffed half my night away.

Well—I don't know,
But these folks imaged in a way
Their landscapes ample spread;
The daughter was the wild-rose red;
The son, the beech in breeze;
The mother was the willow gray;
The father, wrought of seas.
And all were Sussex to the bone,
For, with their gentleness was mixed much stone!

THE DRAGON-FLY

When I survey a dragon-fly
A pregnant thought is mine:
How there can be a shred of doubt
Exists a Mind divine.

Why search for living miracle
When dragon-flies still fly
Or poise on stalk, ethereal,
Scarce visible to eye,

With glassy wings which scintillate,
Blue body like a line
And flight as swift as any star's
Across the sky's confine.

Walkern Downs

LODESTAR

Did I leave love behind then ?
Lost I that love in my sad youth,
Dreaming upon far landscapes, when
All my soul sickened for the truth—
Waited for those pure melodies
Which, once heard, annihilates for
Ever passionate love that lies
Insurgent in the heart's hot core ?

Each May I ask myself again
This thing, seeing the lovers lying
On the downs. Then lift I up in pain
My eyes upon a Sussex spring,
Still mindful of that music no ears
Heard, expectant, still, to see a form
That's scarcely flesh and blood, no years
Make older and no passion's storm.

Sussex Downs

SHEPHERD TO DOG

Dog, whose days are done,
Whose death draws near,
What are you dreaming of—
Stretched out there?

Shepherds and sheep-bells
And lambs in the fold;
Spring-times and summers
And winters cold—

All that I trained you for—
Cannot forget?
The flesh is weary;
The mind works yet.

Two glazed eyes raised
To mine—they say:
“Master, I’m ready.
Take me away!”

Oh faithful, faithful!
Grieve, grieve not so!
Soon comes the Shepherd
Of the Snow.

THE VIOLET-WILLOW

Flaked with snow,
The violet-willow
 Leans low
To the crystal pool's flow.

Mate denied,
It has no other guide
 But pride—
This delicate spring bride,

So elegant,
Whose whole day is spent
 Down bent,
On its own form intent.

NOCTURNE

The earth is still.
Even the flock upon the hill
Moves not—its lone sentinel
Struck by the day's spell.

Only the grasshopper sings
Of ultimate drowsy things
And drones the bee his double-bass,
Homewards through space.

Whispers no wind.
Life has just dropped behind!
The butterfly sleeps on the stem
Of a poppy's ruby gem,

And in the nests the birds
And on the slopes the herds
Dream of those shimmering distances
Where Quiet is.

DAHLIAS

'Tis not because each single dahlia stands
Yellow or pink or red within its vase,
Glinting like fallen stars from heaven's bars,
I sadden so at what my vision scans;

Nor just because upon the lovely lands
(Seeing such splendour in my porcelain jars)
I know that autumn soon shall start her scars,
I am so sad with head between my hands;

But for past scenes these flowers frame for me,
Deep in the dungeon of this English vale:
Masses of blood-red dahlias on a hill
That looked on Nanga's snow-serenity
And cool veranda and madonna pale. . . .
Oh dreams—oh memories—be still! be still!

REBIRTH

A knell has just rung over my lost life
And brought the curtain down upon its close,
After infinitude of ceaseless strife
That every man before his rebirth knows.
The game is up—the disillusionment
Of summer stars—the lie of sunny skies—
All the poor pleasures of this earthly tent—
All the poor playthings of the worldly wise—
And stretches forth interminable void;
Dry desert destitute of one green spot.
Oh knell, oh miserere on my end!
Oh prelude into Peace, my final Friend!

THE WILY LARK

I watched you, innocent,
Rising aloft
On beauty bent;
Starring the soft
Sussex twilight,
Till lost to sight.

I watched you drop
On weary wings
Towards the beacon top,
With twitterings
All silent now
Near the hill's brow.

I watched you pass your nest
That lay just where
The downs' crest
Dipped to a layer
Of misty bluebell
In a hidden dell

And, without delay,
Land quietly,
Many yards away;
Then, furtively,
Steal all unseen
Home through the green.

THE OWL

He whistles, wanton, in the night—a ghoul—
When all the world's asleep,
Dolorous nocturnes to a neighbouring owl
In distant coppice deep.

He whistles, wanton, when the sun has sunk
And earth is wrapped in rest
Sad vespérales, like some tree-cloister'd monk,
Beside his hollowed nest.

And then on silent wing he flaps away
To swoop upon his loot
And, clutching in two cruel claws his prey,
Returns to watch and hoot.

Wiltshire

LUX EX TENEBRIS

To-day the book at which I'd worked one year
My publisher returned to me—the dear!
I rushed into the street in black despair
To find I was not wanted even there.
Suddenly in some shop, what did I see
Inscribed: 'champagne on draft at one and three!'
Straight in I sped and drank the liquor blessed
Till books and b——y publishers went west.

Oh blessed vintage, Bacchanalian dope
You fired my being with redoubled hope!
The dingy bar became celestial bower;
The bar-maid turned into a lovely flower.
And in the dusky silence there I wrote,
As Beauty broke upon me, note by note,
A lyric, fragrant of a fleeting mood,
With which at last, who knows, I may make good.

INDIAN SUMMER

Yes—this is August,
And heat shimmers the land,
And the roads have dust,
And the trees blow furnace-fanned;
Wan birds fly in flocks
Or sit silently in trees
And on parchèd rocks
Grey lizards sun-bask at ease—
And sometimes rain pours
Leaving a languor behind—
And through long hot hours
Sighs a sirocco wind.

Yet here never spoke
The voices that bring back her:
Bull-frogs croak-croak-croak
And tree-beetle's zyr-zyr-zyr—

The time two hearts broke. . . .

Marlborough Downs

ENGLISH DAWN

Why scour the Universe for miracles
Or look for wonders in some magic book?
Day-break at Dorking's good enough for me,
Spell-bound by a little winding brook,
Watching a gossamer-mist—more delicate
Than ever draped Venetian blue lagoon
Or clothed the contemplative majesty
Of Hindustan's white Taj beneath the moon—
Rise slowly from its bed of Surrey soil
And, leaving marsh and willows in the lurch,
Soft-cameo'd against the crimson woods,
Girdles the pearly steeple of a church,
Whose scintillating weather-cock above,
Catching and losing the sun's rosy ray,
Flashes, a brilliant jewel in the blue,
Message of welcome to approaching day!

Dorking

ECONOMY

It is a quaint conceit:
I like the budding hedge
Best in a busy street
And flowers on a ledge.

All lonely things are dear;
More beautiful that tree
Blossoming single there
Than flowering forestry.

Strange, strange this human soul;
It needs but one fine thing
To glimpse the perfect whole
Of an approaching spring.

THE RING-DOVE

At twilight time in Leicester Square
A ring-dove sits upon her nest.
She sees the painted whores pass there—
The flotsam-jetsam and the blest—

The vulgar glare of cinema
And Café Anglais where they dance,
Theatre, drink-bar, Alhambra—
She grasps the picture at a glance.

I wonder what that wise bird thinks
Upon her simple seat of sticks.
Is it in sleep her eye-lid blinks
Or cold contempt, as clock strikes six ?

A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LAD

Oh lovely lad
At the chaff-cutter's wheel,
Making my life possible;
Providing my very meal!

Blue eye'd and bronzed,
So natural
That, when the sky-lark sings
Aloft, standest not still

Spell-bound,
Like some rapt poet,
But workest wisely on,—
Knowing thyself laureate

Of life's loveliness
By being simply—Man;
Deeming it superfluous
To praise part of thine own clan!

AUTUMN PLOUGHING-MATCH

Sere stretch the woods
And sturdy ploughs young Tom
'Gainst distance dim,
And like the lying leaves
Sometime must Tom
Lie low with weakened limb.

Yet no sad song
For him my muse shall sing.
Though Tom be dead,
Soul love—it doth not die,
But lingers on
When flesh to dust is wed!

Buntingford

THE THISTLE

Match'd with the hardy hills and the high day
Is this tall thistle's sovereign display,
Standing six feet with thick two-inchèd trunk
And roots full fathom deep in downland sunk;
Perfectly formed with leaves broadest at base,
Tapering away to that dark flashing face
Which greets the summer and the shimmering heat
As friends who love the light and hate deceit.

His kingly head now bows before the wind
Down to the hefty humans of his kind:
Ploughmen and carters, shepherds with their flocks—
All who are rooted on the solid rocks—
Prickly, uncomfortable, stubborn folk,
Tough as the fibres of an English oak.

Tann Hill

ON HEARING A SERVICE BROADCAST

Oh stop the service!
There are beggars at the doors;
They are cold and starving
And have such grievous sores.

Oh stop the service!
There are harlots in the street
Who, if they knew God's love,
Would wash the Saviour's feet.

Oh stop the service!
Stop all that sickly tosh!
Nor thee, nor foolish flock
Shall ever Saviour wash.

Below my study stands
An open public-house,
Kinder than cloister'd church
Though there men may carouse.

FORGIVENESS

I had an enmity;
It rankled deep.
All that was reasonable in me said:
‘Hatred keep’!
Daily my pride increased—
‘As ye sow, so shall ye reap!’
I never noticed
The poison through me creep;
Nor that my tenement nigh tumbled
A débrised heap.

And then, one day, a distant flute I heard
Put all my ire to sleep.
It played a plaintive tune
Shepherds play to sheep,
Leading them home at sunset
Down the steep.
Old fountains in my heart
Awoke to leap.
And quietly, quite quietly,
I began to weep.

SYMPATHY

I lived one moment
In this deadly day
Of friendless folk and
Heavens ashen grey.

'Twas when I whispered
To a poor old mare
Whose answering ears
Spoke deeper than a prayer.

TO A——

I would have loved you wholly, flesh and soul,
But Fate decreed it otherwise than this.
I would have made your life one day of bliss.
Together we'd have formed a perfect whole.
There would have been no battling towards a goal;
Love wins its victories with smile and kiss;
Love needs no shallow artifice!
And yet its record guilds the noblest scroll.

How has it chanced that you were not for me
Nor I for you when all the world was filled
With our four eyes?—world never sung nor said—
World that was waiting patiently to be?
What God is this who could have wisely willed
Such love as yours and mine still-born and dead?

GROWTH

Along the sunny street
Stretched limes in line,
Cut about and pruned,
Yet still divine:
For, something in their life
Reflected mine.

Above each bleeding bough
Trembled a sheaf
Of shimmering emeralds
Beyond belief:
The leaves upon the trees
Hid all their grief!

Oh, blessed miracle!
For now I knew
Why my misfortunes
Made me anew;
Why I should sing this song
Out of my rue.

EASTER-DAY

Not only do I feel to-day Christ risen,
I feel Him also in the fields' orison;
I hear Him in that plethora of praise
From Pan awakening now with new amaze.

Christ lived for me and also for this earth;
He died that I and it should win new birth;
He rose to prove Man's immortality,
A symbol of each April's ecstasy,

Adding new notes to yonder lark's first flight;
New radiance to that rising ball of light,
Making each blossom richer by a bud;
Each heart-beat quickened by new-pulsing blood
Only young lovers know at Easter-time,
Kissing in woods while far cathedrals chime.

Essex

‘I HAD NOT MEANT TO SING’

I had not meant to sing to-day,
But how can I help
Record the roundelay,—

Not spring’s but winter’s prelude ?
The hills stood out
In scarlet solitude

· A week ago: then came a break
Of storms—a starlit sky—
And now the world’s awake,

Ah, God! awake indeed,
Lovelier than ever,
Naked, over the mead!

I had not meant to sing this lay
But beauty broke forth in me
Again,—as in this day.

THE ICICLES

Stillier than the sky's arc
They hang, transparent, stark
From the window-sill,
Frozen fingers no earthly thing
Ever can colour bring;
With feeling fill.

The north wind is so cold,
But it moves—is not old.
The snow-drop below
Is deathly white,
Yet trembles despite
Its lack of glow.

Nor can the nestling sparrow
Nor the neighbouring crow
Have aught to say
To these dead crystals,
Whose rigidness appals
Like skeletons the day.

RUSTIC LOVE

I

DICK'S DREAM

A little home
With my belovèd
And all I want
In life is said:

Small cottage thatched
Beside a tree
And bridal-bed
For Moll and me.

A fertile field
And orchard-close;
A garden where
The west-wind blows.

And I would work
With horse and plough,
While Moll would milk
The brindle-cow.

And if the Lord
Were generous
A sturdy child
He'd give to us.

Then come long life,
Come storm, come shine!
I'd fear no fate
Were such things mine.

Bassett's Green

MOLL'S FULFILMENT

At last he came to me
Out of a flaming west
And he was sweet to see
In Sunday suiting dressed.

He had kind eyes of blue,
A brave and bronzed face,
Limbs like an oak-tree true
And step of panther's grace.

He took me in his arms
And whispered words of love,
Yet still I had my qualms—
'Twas one more dream of love.

Dear God—it was no dream
This time—nor mock-ideal.
No phantom's lips, I deem,
Are warm—my love was real!

The heavens broke in song,
The flowers and the birds;
My lover's arms were strong;
Full passionate his words.

Weston

VETERAN

He is ready for Sleep now,
Bent over his book—
A diary of deeds—how
Reflective his look!

The rough relics on the walls,
Those links of his life,
Speak as the soft sunshine falls
On kukori and knife.

Oh old infant that you are,
Never yet quite grown,
Sharp spear, sword and scimitar
Were ever your crown!

Child still—a child who played
With symbols of thoughts;
Visions born of burnished blade;
Poems formed from forts.

Warrior dreaming into Night,
Parsifal at heart;
Simple soldier who did fight,
Soon to sleep apart!

THE TRAMP'S SONG

I'm glad I'm not respectable
And drive in limousines
With ladies and their little dogs
And talk to precious queens.

I'm glad I'm not a mighty king
And go in gilded state
And bow to beating hearts around
Yet cannot boast a mate.

I'm glad I'm neither great nor rich
And have a humble heart;
Can still find fairies in a ditch
And poetry in a cart.

OLD BACHELOR'S SONG

The boys are everywhere,—
In crowded tube and shop;
Along the thoroughfares;
Upon the busses' top,

Usually with mothers
Or elder sister, sweet,
Their faces curiously intent
On everything they meet.

Oh, pictures of happiness!
Which is the more dear?—
Their mothers' adoration
Or their joy at being here,

With prospect of the sea,
Bathing and shrimping galore,
Sailing, boating and fishing
Along a golden shore.

The most exquisite music,
Heard upon earth to-day,
Is the child's prelude
Before its holiday.

Like a carillon
It sounds through the streets.
Three times a year I hear
Its immortal beats.

And once I sang it, too,
In those dear days that were.
Yet, though I've lost the tune,
Its echo still I hear.

NATURE

I think the sheen upon a field of wheat
In summer, when the corn's grown to the full
And poppies peep between the laden ears,
Than any masterpiece is far more beautiful.

I think the wind across that field of wheat,
Forcing each blade to bend, each poppy nod,
Makes finer music than a symphony
Coming, spontaneously, straight from the heart of
God!

THE WHITE BLACKBIRD

Sweet-heart—stay!
A moment gone,
Dark was my day;
Sun no more shone:

Till the sight of you
On a pine bough
Made me anew—
I know not how.

Happy was I
And free of care
And all because
Of you, dear, there.

It is God's whim
When a man's ill
To heal him
With miracle.

See, these short lines
You've heard and hopp'd
Out of the pines,—
Glad that I stopp'd!

THE BOOM-CRANE

Upward it soars,
Calm and sublime,
Over the grime
And city's roars.

Rhythmical,
With beating heart,
Its pincers part,
Pause—and then fall.

Its simple lines
Suit the wide sky;
Fit the panoply
Of cloud confines.

And simple men
Work with the cranes—
Brave men with brains
That need no pen!

THE CHELTENHAM FLIER

Deep silent dusk on Reading Station falls.
For once the trucks are still, the signals straight—
Save those four 'all clear' signals there which state:
'Approaches swift the train Pegasus hauls.'

Across the sky the constellation crawls,
Indifferent to the fact the Flier's late!
Then, all at once, at a tremendous rate,
She whistles a shrill warning that appalls

And thunders past, a jewelled centipede,
With flashing eyes, towards the waiting night
And nostrils breathing forth red flame and spark—
To vanish, rumbling, train and snorting steed,
Leaving behind a memory of light
In my 'maz'd soul—a station, silent, dark.

WOMAN

Angel and devil, both,
Who hath man's life in hand;
Now, thwarted, waxing ruthless, wroth—
Now benefactress bland.

I pondered on thy state
Till one day in my shed
I watched a spider love her mate—
Then eat him up like bread.

Well, what was I to think?—
Man out of Nature grew.
And day descended black as ink
Upon my earth made new.

LINES WRITTEN ON READING NIETZSCHE

Oh England are you as they say
A pleasant place where all men play
In liberty and men may think
And write at will their thoughts in ink—
Be born and live and love and die
And no one ask the reason why
And governments exist because
They graft the nation's self-willed laws—
Policemen prowl to make more sure
The sanctity of home, more pure
Our souls, safer our solid nights—
Are you in truth that land of rights,
Of open press, remaining one,
Unbiased, 'neath this earthly sun—
Or are you an appalling isle,
Some prison where men moult and die while
Crushed by the mediocre mind
Of burghers and the banya¹ kind,
Whose God is custom, heaven whole,
Established church, with gold their goal?

¹ Merchant.

TREES

These trees against the night
Are measure of man's sin,
Their tranquillescent sight
Awakes my soul within.

When in a town I stand
And wonder at a tree,
Sometimes I understand
The gulf 'twixt it and me.

The tall trees soar so straight
Into the simple sky;
Trees do not love or hate
Or doubt or question why.

SUMMER DAY-DREAM

When I see distant hills,
Sometimes I think of one
With whom I lived awhile
Under an Indian sun.

We gained experience there
Of what Life really is:
A bitter-sweet Illusion,
Fashioned of pain and bliss.

Still violet stretch the hills
As in my ardent youth,
Far lovelier now I know:
Beauty's but half the Truth.

FELLOWSHIP

Exiled the poet
—Do not forget:
The darker his days!
The finer his lays!

Life leaves alone
The man with a groan;
It cannot endure
Sad overture.

Yet poet's friends
Make full amends.
Indeed some say
None better pay

Than clouds and hills;
Flowers and rills;
The wind and rain,
Since these are sane,

Natural, cosmic,
—Never go sick.
Oh fortunate poet
Did he but know it!

PRIDE'S PRISON

Oh sad youth passing prisonwards with sighs
In that dark dungeon grows a crimson rose
Which, from the reservoirs of thy poor eyes,
Thou canst oft water, who still sorrow knows.

But I have here a dungeon darker still
Where neither rose nor reservoir obtains.
Though I be free for ever—I am ill.
My heart is hard. Its ground now knows no rains.

EBB AND FLOW

Far hooting of a brooding bird
And silent trail of shooting-stars;
Dim Corot trees with outlines blurr'd;
Between black branches, diamond bars.

So, stilled earth slumbers after heat
In petal closed and languid leaf.
No field-fares flit about the wheat
Nor nimble mice, now, 'neath the sheaf.

Yet night shall pass and daylight break
Again on fields of golden corn;
Deep blue shall glint again the lake
In the inevitable dawn.

Ardeley

THE YOUNG LABOURER

He lives in an old thatched cottage;
On Sundays rings the bells
And once a week to market goes
His vegetables sells.

On other days throughout the year
He mixes well his work—
Hedging, hoeing or harvesting—
No job would Charlie shirk.

At night when all the stars are out
He ceases work for love
And on two trembling lips he finds
God's blessing from above.

Cromer

OSCAR WILDE

I was so sure
His elegant ghost
Sat in the box there:
In that dim emptiness
Someone surely
Leant back with languid air

And talked on still,
Framing new brilliant
Witticisms;
New polished paradoxes,
Interspersed with ethics
From new Chasubles and Prisms!

And then he seemed to stop
—And gaze curiously
At the smart throng
That flocked to hear the words
Of him they, once, had thought
So criminally wrong.

No scorn was in his face.
I thought he smiled;
As if 't were enough for him
His genius lived;
That art had blotted out at last
His own life's history grim.

Lyric

Hammersmith

THE POPPY

I know that poets oft have called thee wicked;
'Tis true thou art the harlot among flowers,
Passionate beneath the barley hid
And frail, aye frail as yonder rose that dies;
Womanly, too, as her but as a siren
Stifles—not, as a meek maiden sighs.

And yet, God made thee necessary to men,
Who love thee for thy very scarlet stains:
Even this calm old Sussex countryside
Has sometimes Spain within her sluggish veins
—At twilight, 'neath the evening star in June,
When lovers kiss upon the scented meads
And, in a trembling rapture of delight,
Surrender to their hearts' most vital needs!

THE WIND

When the wind blows
Shaken is all the earth
Out of its lethargy
Into youthful mirth.

Once more field and flower,
Humanity and cloud
Banish their brooding dreams
To cry and laugh aloud.

Even my limp soul,
Like this pool-mirrored tree,
Now that the wind blows,
Quivers in ecstasy.

PAST PAGE

Why is it that in each successive spring
When once again black shadows streak the grass
I note them poignantly and quickly pass,
While in my heart dead birds begin to sing?

Seeing once more such shadows quivering
In wild delighted dance, my heart of brass—
Why should it melt; my mind become like glass
That mirrors of its story everything?

It is because the spring brings back each year
A scene so old—oh was it of my time!
I stooped and kissed a ghost-girl very dear.
The wind—it whispered in a lime.
The sun was setting on the Punjab snow
Though mine seemed rising then—long long ago.

LIFE'S LANDMARKS

What is the loveliest thing I see
At every winter's end?
A snow-drop shaking frail and free
As windy hare-bells bend.

What is the sweetest song I hear
Each spring from mating birds?
'Tis songs of Hope and warming cheer
Beyond the need of words!

What is the finest sight I know
Of summer's rich array?
The ripened harvest's golden glow,
Like man in his heyday.

What comforts most at autumn's close
When year is at the fall?
The flaming leaves that prelude snows
Of sleep which folds us all.

COUNTERFEIT

The cuckoo's call;
The forest tree;
The water fall;
The crystal sea,
Natural are
Without a scar.

But Madame's drawl
And gardens neat
And chimneys tall
And city street:
These are all scarred;
Man-fashioned and man-marred.

INDIAN LOVE

No sound stirred in the scented wood.
Above, the stars hung watching down.
Oh stars the sights you must have seen!
The dramas fit for king or clown!

The jackals moaned from nullahs far;
Hyaenas laughed upon the plain
And slid a snake across a path;
A night-wind symphonied the grain.

And Ali waited on and on
Beneath a banyan's branches black,
Till suddenly he heard a sound
Of someone following the track.

Then all was over in a trice—
A thud, a dagger-thrust, a groan.
Immediately the wood was still.
The silent stars watched down alone.

WINTER SONG

How beautifully winter mourns
With black brocade of naked bough!
Each thing immortal Nature makes
With loveliness it doth endow.
Soon spring will break in pattern'd tint
Of wonder scarcely one believes
And summer follow in fine clothes
Of subtly shadowed little leaves,
Which autumn winds shake off in flakes,
Falling like spinning sparks to ground,
Till winter with its webs of jet
And ermine capes comes once more round,
And earth's face bears that tranquil mien
In sleeping faces I have found.

The Green Park

THE IDEAL

You should be wandering with me here
Now blossom blooms and woods are green
And pines slope sapphire skywards there
Where soon shall shimmer bluebell sheen,

Did I not know man ever longs
For what is absent from his sense,
Forgetting but to God belongs
Unlimited Omniscience.

And if I had you by my side—
Your presence—would it match desire?
Would not the need of you have died—
The very fountain of my Fire?

QUESTION

What is the Force that makes me sing
At end of every English spring,
With may a-bloom and lilac out
And all the blessed birds about,
Articulate in scented air
Without a single fear or care ?

Is it a Hope which heaven had—
A vow to make earth always glad,
Before God fashioned it at all—
An oath to make a merry ball!—
To give the lie at last to Night
With endless springtimes that delight ?

Oh careless eagle circling there
Whence comes this feeling every year ?
And happy black-cap on that bough
What magic doth your song endow ?
Tell me you lovely earth just why
I sing of beauty, born to die ?

THE RETURN OF THE EWES

All day I'd lain upon the Wiltshire Downs
And listened to the legends Tom expounds,
The while his faithful dog lay at our feet
Or rounded up the sheep with rushes fleet
Until, at sunset, back to the large fold
We wandered, leisurely, along the wold—
Not easily—the ewes were pressing fast
To reach the lambs. None wished to be the last—
The whole flock packed together, necks stretched out,
Until old Rough would stay them with his snout.

Shall I forget that last rush to the fold
When all my veins are dry and blood runs cold:—
The way the lambs looked over the low pens
To greet their mothers (still that picture wrends!)
Or the immortal music that arose
From lambs and ewes in Nature's needful throes:—
Sounds separate, each one different to hear,
So every one might know his mother near.

Surely the angels had come down from heaven,
For Tom was touched by that deep anthem, even!

TO A WILD ANEMONE

Back again after another year
Within my Kentish wood to meditate.
The outer world is in its old, old state
Of beauty. Budding life's once more here;
Above the open sky; beneath the feathery trees,
Stretching to where, beyond a five-barred gate,
Thorn and pale primrose scent the southern breeze.
Lo! last year's same anemones await!
And I am older by just one more year;
Deep in my heart wells up another tear.

Oh little fallen stars: what's your year's tale?
Have you great failures in its passage found—
Tragedies that made you laugh or wail?
Is all your sweetness born of chastisements?
Was bitterness as well within this vale?
Are you with all your beauty like me bound
Fast yet, limited, spiritually dense?—
Forgetting that to live is but to give,
Like spring's charitable sunshine and soft showers,
Which, born of an inner Beauty, I perceive,
Are yet God's annual gift to earthly sense.
Say, seek you like me at times through prayer those
 powers
That make a man forget material dreams
And every self-indulgence leave
For heights where everlasting Love most gleams?

SANDHURST REVISITED

Here hope shines still.
The sky again
Brightens the lake
With a blue stain.
Young life throbs around
—and no pain.

These college lads
Have faces bright;
They have not learnt
Yet there is night.
Look! that youth yonder
Has faith alright.

Oh happy boy,
Keep ever so!
Lasting duty
Ever know!
Right to the bitter end—
Bravely go!

Dwell deep! dwell deep!
Court not this beauty
Of reflected pines.
Through Soul see—
Not blinding sense. Build for
Eternity!

There the footer fields;
There the cricket-ground;
Racket-court and gym—all there—
And bugle-sound.
Only, my heart that sang—
Cannot be found. . . .

The Lake

LIFE

True life comes of an ever changing state,
Not constant as the starlight's steady rays,
But like the wind. Its course is seldom straight.
Zig-zag it winds throughout one's earthly days.
'Tis tinted like the rainbow's rarest colours
And rainbow colours come and fade and change
In unison with sun and softest showers
And so the richer for their varied range.

True life is but the throb of changing hues,
An iridescent jet of fountain-spray,
Rising and falling subject to the clues
Of new experiences day by day,
To gently cease when Soul hath learnt this life
Is but a stepping-stone to Love through strife.

LIGHT

The planet's heart had ceased to beat;
Its nerves were nought but thread,
For darkness covered sky and hill
And everything seemed dead.

Then suddenly the world awoke;
The sun sailed free of clouds
And, playing on earth's torpid nerves,
Roll'd up her misty shrouds.

Once more the autumn woods flashed red;
The shadowy stream swept by,
While on the face of passing man
Life laughed her ancient lie!

TCHAIKOWSKY THEME

A poor blind beggar wanders
Under grey Russian skies.
Behind him mount the firs,
Rise upon rise.

He sings a simple song
Blind Russian beggars know.
The notes sound sad and long
Over the snow.

They die away in pain;
Are swallowed up in night,
Beyond the Ukraine plain,
Glimmering white.

Queen's Hall

ATHLETE IN ACTION

He hits the tennis-ball with easy grace,
Soul lighting up the lines of his young face.
Each stroke is made with sculptured equipoise;
Music of motion is his chief of joys.
With equal grace the Grecian threw the disc
In antique times at Marathon or, brisk
Along the level of Athenian plain,
So ran the lad with poise of limb and brain,
While Philoläus, best comrade of all Greece,
Applauds his bosom friend in war and peace.
Hurlingham

UIST-SHEPHERD'S SONG

Oh Dalua¹ touch me,
Flute within mine ear
That dreaded tune
No mortal may hear.

Long since I've waited
For that tragic tune,
High on peat-pastures
Over loch and dune.

Too weary the way
Of earth-life I find
Now my love's left me.
Touch, touch, be kind!

Kelpies are calling:
'Come down to the sea.'
Play, Dalua, play
On your flute for me.

Barra

¹ The Fairy Fool of Celtic mythology.

SKETCH

The may shakes mirror'd in the stream,
The Whitsuntide is fine.
Sombre against the smiling sky
Stands stark one blue-black pine.

A chest-nut waves its candles white
And birds all break in song,
While from the stream they drag a man
The rushes loved too long.

Ware

THE CLOUD

It broods above the weald
In an azure sky
And watches the peasants
Pile the hay high,

And shifts itself slowly
That it may better see
The swallows swirling
Over the wild-rose tree

And lambkins, gambolling
In the pens by Black Cap
And Sam the shepherd there
Taking his noon-nap.

And then it floats away
Westward upon the gale,
Like some great galleon
Of faërie at full sail.

BIRDS IN SPRING

You build your homes together
In the April weather:
All unschool'd, untaught
Is your wooing, short.

And your homes are free;
Money buys no tree.
Nests are natural,
Unlike house and hall.

Envy know you not;
Love is gladly got.
No mothers will your wives!
No fathers force your lives!

Incompatibilities
In the emerald trees!
Divorces, separations
'Neath the tender fronds!

—Never are they there
Out in the open air.
Sometimes Man will, too,
Live as the birds do.

DE PROFUNDIS

In spring when woods are blue
My heart—it has its dreams;
My sleeping soul is stirred
By bluebell avenue.

But oh 'tis not till June
That Being bursts aflame,
When woods have blots of blood
With ecstasy attune,

And all my buried selves
Pass passionately by,
Like ghosts from fairy-tales
Upon my study's shelves.

Walkern

BLACKTHORN WINTER

Daily a watery sun
Rides down the sky;
Winds that are chill and wet
Whistle and sigh.
Birds sit on branches bare,
Silent and wan,
Where last year blossom was and
Certain sun shone.

Blackthorn is struggling out—
Yet frost at night;
Houses have huge log fires;
Stars still shine bright.
Dawn drives the rain again.
Farmer Garge calls:
'No ploughing to-day, lads—
Work in the stalls!'

And, oh, in the fields, there,
Worse is to tell:
Larks do not sing above
Nor sounds sheep-bell.
Something has hindered the
Spring in its spate.
The swallows foresaw this
And so came late!

All things are ugly out
Of their own time.

Forced growths and nipped growths
Are sad as crime.
But look how the rooks have
Built homesteads high—
Sign that a summer comes—
Sweltering—dry!

FINALE

Close this unhappy chapter!
Ring the last curtain down!
Remembrance of love's laughter
Let Time's sure passage drown.

Think we had never met—
Had never loved awhile,
Let there be no regret—
Recrimination vile.

Forget that we ever were
Gay columbine and clown.
Come, close this unhappy chapter!
Ring the last curtain down!

Ardeley

THE YOUNG NUN

What Voice called her so young to death in life,
Into that joyless prison far from strife?

What impulse made this bud about to bloom
Elect to flower in a convent's gloom?

What whisper in this waking girlish heart
Bade it forsake the world to live apart?

What vision drove such loveliness to go
And hide so soon and lose so soon its glow,

Burying its beauty 'neath a veil—
Beauty that could have turned a red rose pale,—

Nipping the plant of passion at its root
Before it bloomed to break in finest fruit—

What but Annihilation's ancient urge—
Self-sacrifice—the penitential's scourge!

PORTRAIT

He passed me quickly in the crowded street:
Scrubby moustache, dapper and trim and neat
As when he was at school. Only the years
Had left his face scarred like some battered peak.

The gist of him was there—stout spirit that
I saw within those eyes years back—the steady glance—
Sweetness and gentleness. Only Experience,
The Winds of Time, had blown all dross away,

Leaving bare rocks of gold below—the ore
Of noble character. Oh what are lines
But tell-tale marks of suffering endured—
Flesh moulded to the measure of Man's soul?

Piccadilly

SAD SONG

The crocus comes
Which used each spring to speak
And wake, with words
Of love, hearts winter numbs.

The snow-drop shakes
Its bell above the ground
In ecstasy
With every bud that breaks.

The wood-dove builds
With an age-old wonder
Learnt of the stars
And prehistoric hills.

The west-wind blows
Its ancient rich refrain,
Forgotten long
Beneath far silent snows.

Only in me
Resounds no answering note
And desolate
I roam by brook and tree.

CITY SNOW-STORM

The flakes they fall and fall
So beautifully
And with a virgin's shawl
Cover up church and tree.

The chilled city crowd
Scurry to tube and home.
One bearded beggar bowed
Sings on beneath a dome.

Only a child awakes
With wonder at the snow
That maketh with its flakes
A fairy-land below.

VOYAGE

In youth I sang
At sight of crystal-cupped magnolia;
When snow-drops sprang
Up virginal; flamed the forsythia—

Anemone
Vied in the waking woods with daffodils
To woo the bee—
The first that flew from winter's hushèd hills

And mist of larch
Soft-hazed the sapphire scyllas at their feet
And emerald arch
Of elms the year's first courtiers did greet

And almond bloomed,
Kissing with drifting petals aconite,
When bluebells loomed
Like flakes of fallen sky and in the night

The birds refound
Voices for long-forgotten madrigals
In fountain'd sound,
Welling as if from womb of heavenly halls.

Mute my muse now.
Nor do I weep. Nor doth the nightingale
Upon its bough
Guess why, with its impassioned fairy-tale.

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